



APPROVED MAY 2021 Board Meeting Minutes – May 17, 2021
Approved by Board of Commissioners on June 21, 2021

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, May 17, 2021 at 5:30 P.M.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT: Chairperson Richards; Vice Chairperson Brooks; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Cancel & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Jack Redman; Sharon Kimble; Attorney Tom O’Connor; Heather Maxwell; Lisa Donoghue; Jose Cruz; Kaitlin Hanning; Donyaël Galland; Joseph & Angela Santaniello and Angela Bourdeau.

Cara announced that Commissioner Laufer gave birth to a 9 pound baby girl this morning!

TENANT COMMENTS

Roy Martin – Salvo – stated that he is running for the Mayor of Northampton. There are people still smoking out front of Salvo and nothing is getting done about it. They are throwing cigarette butts on the ground. Carrots are being thrown in the garden and there is a woman jumping the fence and walking her dog in the garden. I like the Building to look good. Terry Cooper is still coming into Salvo every night. Juan has his walking papers, there are a few others that need walking papers too.

These people go on different floors in Salvo and the cameras should be looked at daily at least for 10 minutes. Find where Sally Johnson is going. You have the technology, let’s use it. Getting asked questions about the wearing of masks in the building. I said if the signs are up you still wear the mask. I went to a graduation party this past weekend and put my cars in the barn as I wrecked my jaguar.

Angela Bourdeau – Salvo –#230 has a complaint about the tenant that lives across from her – Amina – I have written several letters to NHA regarding her many times over the last few months and I always get the response “we are working on it”. She is urinating in the elevators and she wanders every night dazed around 11:00 p.m. and beyond. I hear the people that bring her back to her apartment. Over the past few months she has started urinating in the elevator. She drinks a lot and brings in homeless people. I have called the Police, she goes to the hospital and they bring her back. Because of her behavior and urinating I feel she should be in a facility. I want something done on how NHA is handling the situation.

Angela Santaniello – Salvo- things are getting better, Housing is sending a lot of letters. Elevator, hall and bench issues – Housing is addressing. We are not privy to how the Housing is handling a lot of these issues, but we can see some of the positives – thank you. Also the Maintenance crew is doing a great job.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NONE

STAFF COMMENT -NONE

APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 2021 MINUTES

Vice Chairperson Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield. .

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the April minutes.

Chairperson Richards stated that the evaluation tool went out and only received 3 back – please send them back to me.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – evaluation forms asks for a signature, I wrote it out and scanned to you as a PDF.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioners Tarbutton-Springfield and Cancel, I will gather the comments and scores and write something up and get it back to you.

Commissioner Tarbutton – I am not sure that I can vote on this. .

Chairperson Richards – you don't have to fill out the numerical but if you have comments or future direction you would like to see, just let me know.

NEW BUSINESS

DISCUSSION AND VOTE

1 Year Extension for Service Team's Collective Bargaining Agreement as requested by unit members.

Cara – their contract expires on 6/30/21 – the Business Representative reached out to me after meeting with the Union members who are in agreement that they would also like to extend the current agreement for one year for COVID. They don't feel comfortable coming out to meet with their people, they just would like to know if it would be amicable to extend the agreement until June 30, 2022.

Commissioner Jones – does it come with a wage increase or cost of living adjustment?

Cara – yes 2% automatic and 2% based on performance and that happened in July.

Commissioner Jones put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

MOTION – ADOPTION OF REVISED INCOME LIMITS FOR ADMISSION FOR STATE PROPERTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH DHCD PHN 2021-06.

Cara – DHCD revised the Income Limits for admission to state-aided public housing and for participation in the Alternative Housing Voucher Program which are effective April 1, 2021. These income limits are set at two year intervals and are the Low Income Limits set by HUD for a similarly sized household in the city or town in which the LHA is located.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

MOTION

ACCEPT THE ALLOCATION OF EMERGENCY HOUSING VOUCHERS AWARDED TO NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY FROM AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

Cara - Out of all the Housing Authorities 12 were awarded and we were on of the 12 – it is a huge compliment in my opinion. These vouchers are to assist people we are experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or human trafficking or were recently homeless. We would accept the 17 vouchers plus 8 for a total of 25. This will allow us to help with security deposits and first and last month rents.

Chairperson Richards – if we have the additional 8 will it be accepted separately?

Cara – No, I have to say if we will accept, and that we will accept the minimum and up to 8 more, but not more than 25. They will let us know what we were awarded.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – this is a wonderful thing. A concern about problems with tenants here and how we can accommodate their needs. I worry about that.

Cara – these are for Section 8 vouchers only through the Federal Government. VASH vouchers are for Veterans as well a continuum of care vouchers. These are portable, where they live in private landlord housing.

Chairperson Richards – does it include services or is it strictly rent?

Cara – it is a huge packet, I would present a MOU to change the continuum of care to provide other services.

Vice Chairperson Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

RESOLUTION 1189

APPROVE ROLLING CAPITAL FUND PLAN 5 YEAR ACTION PLAN FOR MCDONALD HOUSE AND FLORENCE HEIGHTS

This will improve its Federally funded state aided housing for FY2021-FY2024 and increase in funding to \$244,715.00 and it further authorizes the Executive Director to take all actions necessary and proper for implementation of said Plan. This will take effect immediately.

Commissioner Cancel – of that extra funding is there a specific percentage going to each property?

Cara – No, really the overall difference is the money for the new elevator for McDonald. Cara then went over what each property was going to have done over the next four years.

Commissioner Cancel – this is the same as the 5 year action plan we received?

Cara – yes.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Cancel.

Vice Chairperson Brooks abstained, Cara explained she spoke with the Attorney and Mr. Brooks may vote, he can abstain only if it pertains to his unit.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Resolution.

MOTION

APPROVE FY21 EMPLOYEE BENEFIT BALANCES DUE TO COVID-19

Cara – the current policy is use it or lose it with the discretion of the Executive Director to roll over unused time, but would use it no later than March. Due to the pandemic employees have not been able to utilize their benefit time. We are approaching the last month of our fiscal year. Employees will lose their benefits. Providing even a one year extension would be detrimental to the Housing Authority since many employees are long term and therefore get a large amount of time off. If passed, this would appear on the compensated absences line of our budget not salaries.

Chairperson Richards – are the employees in favor or do they want vacation time?

Cara – I haven't talked to them, but they were very thankful last year when we did this.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

Commissioner Cancel – my company is private, they opted to give us an extension but it is also hard to take time off. Whatever we can do to help the staff the better. I am in full support. Next year maybe we can plan better so they can take time off.

Cara – this is not an extension, this is a pay in lieu of time. We are on a fiscal year, not calendar year. On July 1st employees get a new bank of time. They could take time off during COVID but there was no where they could go. Staff worked hard during the pandemic.

Chairperson Richards – the policy reads they would lose it.

Cara – yes but the ED can use discretion.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

DISCUSSION

ACQUISITION OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY UNITS AS REQUESTED BY HCRHA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS.

Cara – we entered 8 months ago into a management agreement to manage 40 units in Cummington and Huntington. They want to disband and give the units to NHA. This is a huge compliment, this would give us more inventory, the units are cute. It will take several years to complete as it is a long process and has to be put through legislation. Right now we have employees who are getting extra money in their paycheck to help run HCRHA. We would absorb their budget. DHCD says if the Board wants to dissolve, people helping to run it shouldn't be penalized and not get paid. DHCD doesn't want them to suffer. As an agency, I recommend we proceed in this.

Chairperson Richards – our vote will be to continue to pursue?

Cara – it will take several years to finalize the process. This will allow us to proceed, we will start the legislation process to absorb their units.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – did we see dollars on this?

Cara – they have a small budget but they are not in the red. For Northampton it would be making sure low income housing stays. You can say no and we would go back to them and tell them to look at other Housing Authorities.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – they want to dissolve and us to absorb – can you explain?

Cara – they have 40 units and some single family units and some elderly disabled units.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – if they are absorbed and incorporated does it mean a Salvo resident could transfer?

Cara – technically yes, but they would have to qualify for those units. There are many different facets

Chairperson Richards – how would it affect our Board?

Cara – you would approve Accounts payable and other items.

Commissioner Jones – would be doing some maintenance also. Is there a possibility of expanding the maintenance union and how much of a strain to the employees now for the long term?

Cara – staff – 1 part time administrative support and 2 maintenance men at 18 hrs a week. Jack goes up once a week. One full time person could run it, with supplementation. As for Administrative burden they have received money to do the extra tasks and don't feel like it would be a problem.

Chairperson Richards – a non-binding vote?

Cara – willing to accept legislature to take over HCRHA.

Commissioner Cancel – what type of maintenance are the properties requiring? Is it a strain to NHA?

Cara – they have employees that we would absorb. Not taking away from our staff's properties. There are two part time maintenance with no benefits. It is not affecting the current maintenance staff.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – is their maintenance unionized?

Cara – if we take over, they would then be unionized.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – I have difficulty with it. I have lived in the Hilltowns and I can't think of them being a part of NHA. That doesn't mean I am right.

Chairperson Richards – what are their other choices?

Cara – can give them to another Housing Authority but it would be a mistake as they and DHCD looked to NHA and DHCD has gone out there and has seen a huge improvement. Any chance to grow is a huge opportunity.

Attorney O'Connor – it is an incredible compliment to the NHA management team that DHCD reached out to us and asked us to do this. Quite a compliment to Cara and the staff. Now HCRHA wants us to take over. We are a Housing Authority if we can provide housing we should, it is a manageable number of units to manage. It is never a bad thing to do more in a fiscally, socially responsible way. I appreciate Mr. Brooks' comments but we are the logical choice. Pittsfield would be the closest choice. It is a wonderful opportunity for NHA, we should open our arms when we can.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I asked them if they had a snow blower and they said No. How did we handle the snow this year?

Cara – they have an agreement with the City to plow the driveways and lots and the maintenance men do the sidewalks. We have only been there for 8 months and I would do things differently. It would change once they come over to our portfolio, the staff would all come to NHA.

Chairperson Richards – in the meantime we would operate with a management agreement.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – Tom sold me!

Commissioner Jones – Governor Deval Patrick wanted to regionalize everything and all western mass would be under one big tent with one Board. I generally support the process and see how it goes.

Cara – we all need to be on the same page. DHCD tried hard to work with us and to keep funding coming to us so I can pay employees. They are very happy with what is going on.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – when I attended a meeting they were in dire straits and it warms my heart they expressed appreciation and gratitude to us for helping. I am happy about this. Also if the maintenance can be unionized that warms my heart also.

Cara – a huge thank you to the staff. It has been very difficult during COVID. The gold standard of NHA has shown through. I personally thank all of you and it couldn't have been done without you.

Chairperson Richards – For the record, the Board also shows their appreciation to the staff as they went above and beyond.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

Commissioner Cancel – I am not comfortable on voting on this. Tom definitely sold me, but I am not seeing concrete numbers and information about them. On paper it sounds awesome and I am not surprised we are the agency to do what needs to be done. NHA is amazing. What resources will be allocated?

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Cancel

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Vote.

DISCUSSION – HAMPSHIRE HEIGHTS PLAYGROUND UPDATE

Jack Redman spoke – in October and November they had a zoom meeting with the Hampshire Heights residents and shared the equipment that was available from O'Brien and Sons. The kids are excited about the equipment. Last year the City of Northampton delayed CDBG funding, but it is now available again. The kids picked the equipment from a selection of just available to Housing Authority, we received it at a reduced cost. There will also be a patio section where the adults can sit and congregate. This will also be wheelchair accessible. There are concrete sidewalks all the way around with pavers and benches. We will have 6 raised garden beds in addition to the existing garden plots. Some of the equipment arrived today and many families came out of their apartments and jumped for joy! The factory is 6 weeks ahead of schedule and the equipment is stored in PODS. By August 27, 2021 there will actually be a playground! There will also be a welcome sign in front of the property and it will be built by families and volunteers. We will incorporate the design drawn by the kids. We will be short funding for benches and tables so there will be some outreach into the community to sponsor these.

Cara – the revised delivery of equipment really caused a challenge for staff. The staff worked hard, the City also helped us out and we were able to get PODS delivered thankfully very quickly. It was a nightmare until about 3:00 PM today. Everyone pulled together to get the job done – thank you!

Chairperson Richards – looks terrific!

Cara – Jack do we have a price for a bench?

Jack – I will have the information at the next resident meeting in 3 weeks, but I think it will be under \$600.00. I will know by early June.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – so exciting! Amazing! When I see benches, I think it will be a nice place for people to sleep, though. I wish there was also an area for a dog park.

Cara – another key piece to the playground – It could not have been done without the help of Commissioner Cancel. He has helped a lot in getting this together and working with the City and dedicating his time. I have spoken with the Daily Hampshire Gazette and when they go out to the playground to take pictures I would like for you to be present for that.

Commissioner Cancel – I would still like to stay involved with this project. Thank you, Jack for all of your work on this.

Commissioner Jones put forth the motion to adjourn the May meeting at 6:51 P.M., seconded by Vice Chairperson Brooks.

Commissioner Cancel – can I ask about the FMR's – any idea where we are with that?

Chairperson Richards – that is not on tonight's agenda, if you want it on the agenda, we can put it on next month.